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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EPET](#) [GB](#) [EK](#)
SUBJECT: MBANIE-GATE KEEPS GABON-EQUATORIAL GUINEA BORDER
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REF: A. LIBREVILLE 580
[1](#)B. LIBREVILLE 598

Classified By: CDA Katherine Dhanani. Reason 1.4 (b) & (d).

[1](#)1. (U) The failed effort to conclude a Gabon-EG maritime boundary agreement in early September (Ref A) continues to dominate the headlines in Gabon; it is now known as the "Mbanie-gate" scandal. Foreign Minister Ping held a press conference on September 29 to explain the history of the border dispute and appeal for respect of the confidentiality of negotiations. On September 30, the dispute was discussed at a cabinet meeting; the subsequent communique assured the public that Gabonese territory would not be sold and expressed distress and astonishment at the lies contained in media reports. On October 6, Prime Minister Eyeghe Ndong addressed the nation on the subject, requesting Gabonese to use their freedom of speech with responsibility, and assuring the public that no Gabonese leader would dream of selling Gabonese territory.

[1](#)2. (U) On September 29, the National Communications Council suspended for three months the newspaper Les Echos du Nord for unethical reporting on the border dispute. In contrast to highly personal and vituperative reporting in Le Crocodile (Ref B), Les Echos du Nord carried a thoughtful column criticizing infighting in the Gabonese government. It's editor subsequently launched a hunger strike and was hospitalized.

[1](#)3. (C) On October 6 Ambassador discussed next steps in the border dispute with Minister Ping. Ping said that everyone recognized that the political stakes were too high for UN mediation to succeed in Geneva in early October, as planned (Ref A.). No new date has been set. Ping told Ambassador that Gabon would prefer to go directly to the International Court of Justice, but such a step required agreement of both parties. Ping said that at the time of the African Union Summit in Maputo in 2003, the GREG had asked for UN mediation to resolve the question. The Prime Minister echoed this point in his address. (Comment: This new emphasis in the GoG's public description of the border dispute implies that Gabon is tolerating the UN effort to accommodate the GREG's wishes, but would not itself have sought this mediation. End comment.)

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: The rumor mill continues to work overtime on Mbanie-gate. For example, many believe that before the Cabinet meeting on September 30, the Prime Minister was threatening to resign if the President did not dismiss the Ministers of Interior, Finance and Communications. (All four continue in office.) Key insiders, as well as the public at large, are also inclined to believe that the USG is actively

supporting the GREG in this dispute. More credibly, there is general agreement that the border dispute has been overwhelmed by domestic politics in Gabon. Personal attacks related to these negotiations are early skirmishes in the war over succession.

DHANANI